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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the local level where change is supported or resisted, an ethnographic study examined the response of a town in upstate New York to demands for broadening the curriculum within the context of altering the educational environment to better serve the needs of minority youth. The controversy began when a school board member refused to apologize to the Latino community for what many felt were disparaging public comments about Latin Americans and Latinos. Data on the conflict in the larger community included: a public forum in which community members were given the opportunity to present their views on the issue; data from news articles and letters to the editor in the local paper; community radio talk shows; discussions with community members; and observations of public events. Examination of the public discourse suggests sharply differing constructions of group identity and explanations for school failure between minority and senior citizen spokespersons. Analysis of the public discourse provided the framework for an examination of student and teacher responses observed formally and informally during the time that the school district began to respond to minority spokespersons' demands for educational change. Several key themes emerged in faculty discourse: (1) declining student/parent responsibility; (2) teachers as scapegoats; and (3) colorblindness. Findings suggest that the drive to reform the school curriculum to acknowledge cultural diversity challenges popular assumptions and comes up against obstacles both within the schools and within local bases of power, such as school boards. (Three figures representing conceptual frameworks and 22 footnotes are included; 38 references are attached.) (RS)

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Talking American: Dialoguing on Difference in Upstate New York

Ellen Bigler

National Research Center on
Literature Teaching & Learning
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY • SUNY

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Ellen Bigler

National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning
University at Albany
State University of New York
1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222

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Talking American: Dialoguing on Difference in Upstate New York

Ellen Bigler
University at Albany, SUNY

Many Americans now proudly define themselves by ethnic group membership, moving away from past public constructions of a monocultural "American" identity, in which the language and cultural distinctiveness of immigrant and ethnic groups were expected to be publicly downplayed and eventually to disappear. The shift that began in the 1960s toward public acknowledgment of, and demands for support of, the right to "difference" emerged in the 1980s in the form of a sustained battle over the curricula of the nation's schools. Understanding this struggle over the curriculum is essential for educators and those involved in training future generations of teachers, for their support will be of vital importance in carrying out needed educational reforms.

Much analysis of the debate over the curriculum has focused on battles being waged in the academy and the national media. Critiques of the Eurocentric biases of course offerings in educational institutions across the nation, in large measure originating in sustained challenges since the 1960s by minority leaders and academics, have stimulated intense debate over what should count as knowledge in preparing our youth to enter a changing multicultural world. Such critiques have often focused on the history and literature taught to students in schools. Multicultural reformers have urged substantive changes in these areas, in order to better reflect the diversity of our nation and encourage students to respect and value sociocultural difference and the contributions of all groups to our cultural heritage (cf. Nieto, 1992; Sobol, 1989). In such projects, multicultural literature has frequently been cast as

one of the most powerful components of a multicultural education curriculum, the underlying purpose of which is to help to make the society a more equitable one. In light of that purpose, the choice of books to be read and discussed in the nation's schools is of paramount importance. (Bishop, 1992, p. 40)

Yet despite powerful challenges to the Eurocentric foundations of the curricula of the nation's schools beginning in the late 1960s (McCarthy & Apple, 1988), our schools have been slow to respond. Proposed changes have engendered a backlash against multicultural reforms (Swartz, 1992), and little substantive change has taken place (McCarthy, 1992). Studies of literacy and literature instruction suggest, for instance, that changing the content of the literature curriculum, as a single solution, is inadequate (Miller & McCaskill, 1993).

While much attention has been focused on the debate in the academy and national media, understanding what drives these debates requires careful attention to individual actors at the local level. Ethnographic analysis, paying close attention to what people say to each other in public and private, seeks insights into how people perceive, make sense of, and participate in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of their worldviews. Uncovering the underlying premises that structure the curriculum debates, making sense of how people understand and respond to such proposals for change, can provide insights of vital importance; for while policy changes may be issued at the state or national level, it is at the local level that change is supported or resisted, implemented or subverted. Thus this study looks to the local level, at a particular community's response to demands for broadening the curriculum within the context of altering the educational environment to better serve the needs of minority youth; it explores reasons for the ensuing community conflict and then proceeds to focus on the feasibility of the implementation of these demands in the English classroom.

The conflict in the upstate New York city of Arnhem analyzed in the following pages was initially sparked by a school board member (a Euro-American[1] senior citizen supported by a large elderly voting faction) refusing to apologize to the Latino[2] community for what many felt were disparaging public comments about Latin Americans and Latinos. Demands for an apology, and subsequently for his resignation from the school board, escalated into a protracted public

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[1]As noted by Nieto (1992), white Americans of European descent do not generally think of themselves as ethnically European, though some may identify as Irish American, German American, etc. The term "Euro-American" is used in this text to refer collectively to whites of European descent, and suggests that whites (acknowledging internal variation, as is true among other ethnics) can also be thought of as distinctively "ethnic."

[2]Locally, it is the Euro-American population that routinely refers to Puerto Ricans, Costa Ricans, and Dominicans as "Hispanics." Minority community agency leaders also frequently use the term when publicly referring to the Hispanic community. It is a term that has been challenged by spokespersons for the segment of the U.S. population that originates from Latin America and the Caribbean (cf. Melville, 1988; Nieto, 1992), who feel that it glosses over important interethnic differences and does not acknowledge the group's African and indigenous roots. I use the term "Hispanic" but also the proposed substitute "Latino," put forward by many politically active members of the group as more appropriate (and most likely to be used in Arnhem by younger members of the Hispanic community). Hispanics generally identify particular individuals by reference to homeland (as Dominican, Costa Rican, etc.).

dispute, primarily between Arnhem's mostly Euro-American senior citizens and (mostly Latino and some African American) minority spokespersons over the efficacy of the local schools in educating minority youth. With the intent of raising important issues for proponents of curricular change, this study examines the underlying premises upon which each group anchored their claims, and then looks to the schools to explore teacher and student responses.

The first component of the study examines the conflict in the larger community, drawing upon a variety of sources including: a public forum in which community members were given the opportunity to present their views on the issue; data from news articles and "letters to the editor" in the local paper; community radio talk shows; discussions with community members; and observations of public events. Examination of the public discourse suggests sharply differing constructions of group identity and explanations for school failure between minority and senior citizen spokespersons. The analysis of this public discourse, in turn, provides the framework in which the second component of the study, an examination of student and teacher responses, can be understood and demonstrates in the process the existence of linkages between larger social, political, and economic forces and school practices. The school segment of the study draws upon classroom and faculty room observations and discussions (both formal and informal) with students and teachers in the local schools during the time that the school district began to respond to minority spokespersons' demands for educational change.

Community Background

Arnhem, the site of the conflict, is in many respects a microcosm of the larger society. On a national level, profound changes are taking place in the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S. population. As a result of the higher immigration and birth rates of relatively younger "non-white" populations, the percentage of Americans of European descent is declining; if present demographic trends continue, Euro-Americans may constitute less than half the U.S. population by the mid-20th century (Henry, 1990). At the same time, Americans from nonEuropean backgrounds, who first fought their way into national consciousness beginning with the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, now have significantly greater representation in decision-making bodies. They thus have enhanced opportunities to assert their demands for change, including, most recently, their representation in the curricula of the nation's schools (Gray, 1991).

The community of Arnhem began as a small village on the banks of a major river and was initially populated by immigrants and the descendants of English, Dutch, German, and eventually Irish settlers. With the growth of industry in the region in the decades following the Civil War,

it rapidly grew into an important manufacturing center and a "boom town" by the early decades of the twentieth century. By the turn of the century, the city was drawing large numbers of southern and eastern Europeans, particularly Italians, Poles, and Lithuanians, to work in its carpet, garment, and broom manufacturing factories. Older community members today can recount the names of the ethnic neighborhoods that once dotted the city: Little Italy, "Pollock" Hill, Cork Hill, Market Hill (the wealthy area, of long-settled successful residents) and so on. Residents recollect their parents and grandparents continuing to speak their native languages at home and in the ethnic clubs and churches that proliferated in the city. They also recall the days when ethnic group boundaries were rigidly maintained: when marrying outside one's ethnic group, and particularly one's religion, was frowned upon; when youth hung out in ethnic cliques that had their bases in the ethnic neighborhoods and elementary feeder schools; and when parents admonished marriageable children to "stick with your own kind." Not until the 1950s did interethnic or interreligious marriages among these descendants of southern and eastern European immigrants become more acceptable.

It was also in the 1950s that the beginnings of industrial flight and its long-term impact began to appear. Like other cities in the Northeast built around manufacturing, Arnhem began to lose its industrial base to the South and, eventually, overseas, where labor costs, without strong unions, were significantly less. Moving into the void created by industrial flight were a range of employers offering low wages, uncertain employment, and few if any benefits. Some employers initially recruited "cheap labor" to work in the secondary labor markets; in other cases people migrated to the area and sought work in these burgeoning industries. As in many declining older industrial towns and cities, it was people of color[3] and the newest immigrants who, faced with declining opportunities for work in primary labor markets, moved in to work at marginal jobs. Arnhem's present-day Puerto Rican and Costa Rican communities gained a foothold during this era, the new residents ultimately establishing the family networks that would help pave the way for later (im)migrants[4] to enter the community.

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[3]A growing number of spokespersons from so-called "minority" groups now suggest replacing the term with the phrase "people of color," as the term "minority" has, in their opinions, taken on negative connotations, and used to refer collectively to groups of nonEuropean origin who are predicted to outnumber Euro-Americans in the near future, will soon be statistically inaccurate. See Nieto (1992) for a detailed discussion of appropriate terminology. I also use the term "minority" in this paper because it was the terminology still universally used in this particular community to refer to groups from nonEuropean backgrounds. But while Latino and African American spokespersons generally used the term to encompass all "nonwhites," Euro-American senior citizens in the community using the term never made reference to Asian Americans or Native Americans, but instead appeared to use it to refer to Hispanics and African Americans.

[4]The term (im)migrants refers to people migrating from other countries as well as internal migration movements, which include Puerto Ricans moving from Puerto Rico and other regions of the nation to Arnhem. Despite the fact that Puerto Ricans have been citizens since 1917, when the United States government unilaterally granted them citizenship status, many Euro-American community members routinely referred to them as "immigrants."

As Arnhem becomes home to increasing numbers of Latinos, interethnic and intergenerational conflicts are becoming more apparent. While the numbers of Hispanics have increased, the city's total population continues its downward trend, from its all-time high of 35,000 in 1925 to its current size of 22,000. Younger members of the Euro-American work force have left the community in search of better employment opportunities, and the proportion of senior citizens[5] (over age 55) has increased to its current high of over thirty percent of the population. Today 47% of all households in Arnhem have at least one person over 60 years old; and it is the seniors who are most vocal in their criticisms of the Hispanic community and the costs of educating a new generation of Americans.

While New York City Puerto Rican community leaders by the early 1970s were rallying support among metropolitan Puerto Ricans to press for educational changes that included bilingual education and the teaching of ethnic studies courses (Cordasco & Bucchioni, 1973), there was no similar public outcry in Arnhem. Here the Hispanic population remained relatively invisible until the 1980s, when a dramatic increase in the size of the community occurred. The Hispanic population in Arnhem, according to census figures, grew by 71% during the 1980s, fueled not only by people coming directly from Puerto Rico and to a lesser extent Costa Rica and other Latin American countries, but also increasingly by metropolitan area transplants seeking better educational opportunities for their children and relief from the drug and crime-infested inner cities of the Northeast. According to the 1990 census, Hispanics today represent 11.5% of the population[6]; many in the Hispanic community, however, insist that the most recent census seriously undercounted Hispanics, whose mobility, possible distrust of government officials, and (in some cases) illegal status would make them less likely to be counted accurately by census takers. The average age of the Hispanic population in Arnhem, as in the nation in general (Valdivieso & Davis, 1988) is significantly younger than that of the Euro-American segment of the population.

Analysis of media coverage of the Hispanic community and discussion with community members in Arnhem indicate that the Hispanic community was "tolerated" during the early decades of its existence, though largely excluded from many traditional avenues for upward mobility, including access to the better jobs. Heavily concentrated in the east end of the city, the

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[5]The majority of the senior citizens are the children or grandchildren of the southern and eastern European immigrants who entered the area in the earlier part of the century.

[6]Hispanics make up 16.8% of the student population, with individual school percentages varying from 4.8% to 34.6%; African Americans (0.9% of the city population) comprise 2.2% of the student population; and Asian Americans (0.7% of the city population) make up 1% of the student population.

construction of the Arnhem Mall in the city center during the early 1970s--what one Hispanic leader refers to as the "Arnhem Wall"--further isolated much of the Hispanic population from the Euro-American population, though today a growing number live scattered throughout the city.

Services designed to meet the particular needs of the Hispanic community were almost nonexistent until the 1980s. In the city's schools, most teachers had little or no knowledge of Puerto Rican culture or the literature on educating culturally and/or linguistically different students; as late as 1990 there was little or no acknowledgment of the need to move toward greater inclusion of the perspectives and experiences of the various minority groups in the curriculum, sometimes because of lack of awareness, other times deliberately. One school librarian, for example, explained the virtual absence of books in the school library written by and about Puerto Ricans as a deliberate choice on her part, as she believed that the presence of such books could retard Puerto Rican students' assimilation into the American mainstream. Tensions between some teachers and Puerto Rican students were evident, with teachers generally explaining "problem" behaviors in psychological terms or indicating them to be rooted in the deficiencies of the home culture. "Racial" altercations were reported to occur on occasion, but there were no concerted attempts to address the roots of such conflicts until recently; at the high school, deputies were hired in the late 1980s to patrol the halls and monitor people entering the building and parking lot.

Background to the Conflict

Conflicts within the community came to the fore in the summer of 1991, as a result of a local school board member's public response to proposed revisions in the New York State social studies syllabus (see Sobol, 1989). School board member John Marris, a Euro-American senior citizen and former fiscal officer of a local carpet factory, who had recently been elected by a strong senior citizen turnout on a platform advocating fiscal conservatism[7], was asked how he felt about the strong multicultural emphasis in the recently approved report on the need for social studies reform in New York State. His response, which was included in a newspaper article covering the New York State Education Department recommendations, made the first page of the local paper. He stated that he hoped minorities who had made "genuine contributions" would be included in history lessons, but that

[7]The board was composed of eight Euro-Americans and one Costa Rican American businessman (who rarely spoke at public meetings). Of the eight Euro-American members, six were senior citizens and fiscal conservatives; five of these six voted in a bloc so consistently that they were labeled in the local press as "the Gang of Five."

> ...you have to understand that some contributions have been disasters. The Spanish people in South America, for instance, can't run a country without total chaos. You don't find that in Western civilization because people there are reasonably intelligent and know how to do things.

His comments were immediately picked up by the leadership of a local Hispanic community agency, which had in the past proposed educational changes that they believed could better meet Hispanic students' needs, including among them bilingual and multicultural education. Within the local Hispanic community, Marris became a symbol of bigotry and insensitivity, a view also supported by the editorial staff and the reporter of the local paper covering the debate, as well as by many in the Euro-American community.

Despite demands by members of the Hispanic and African American community[8] at the next board meeting for an apology, Marris continued to insist that his comments were not intended to reflect upon the local Hispanic community. Several days later, when asked to comment on the public outcry over his remarks, he said that he had cancelled vacation plans because he feared that his house might be vandalized:

> I'm afraid of vandalism. Some of the younger Hispanics--high on drugs--may decide to retaliate because I haven't issued an apology for my earlier comments....

He had mixed feelings about notifying the local police because "some of them may be Hispanic as well." Minority community leaders (one African American woman and several Hispanics)[9] then demanded his resignation from the school board. He steadfastly refused to do so, and at the following board meeting approximately 25 local Hispanics, many waving picket signs, were joined by approximately the same number of Latino students from the state university campus in a neighboring city, who had picketed the high school and talked with local Latino students earlier in the week. The minority contingent (overwhelmingly Hispanic) ringed the board table, making numerous impassioned speeches, demanding Marris' resignation, and arguing for changes in educational programs and policies that would better serve the needs of the minority community. Marris ultimately apologized for his remarks about *local* Hispanics, saying at the same time that

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[8]While most of the people speaking out were Latinos, one of the outspoken proponents for educational change at this meeting and in the ensuing public debate was an African American woman, whose participation broadened the debate from its focus on the educational needs of Hispanic children to the educational needs of minority children. Shortly after the conflict developed, she organized the "Citizens' Alliance against Racism" with the assistance of local religious leaders, the goal of which was to educate people to recognize and combat racism.

[9]Local Asian Americans did not participate in this or any subsequent aspect of the public debate.

his error was in making the statement to the news reporter. Refusing to apologize for his original comments, he insisted that he had said nothing wrong and that his statements were not intended to reflect upon the local Hispanic community. Nor, he said, did he believe they called into question his ability as a school board member to serve all students equally well.

Joining the angry Latino audience at the following board meeting were approximately the same numbers of Euro-American senior citizens. Within the largely conservative senior citizen population, Marris had quickly became a heroic figure wrongly attacked, symbolic of the "white" community that they felt had borne the brunt of attacks by minorities in recent years. In angry, impassioned speeches, Marris supporters attacked the local Hispanic population. The public session, usually twenty minutes long, was cut off after an hour and only after one of the board members proposed a public forum be scheduled to air community grievances.

The public forum that had been proposed to air grievances and concerns was held in the high school auditorium, televised live by the local cable TV station and attended by an estimated 100 individuals, the majority of whom were local Euro-American senior citizens. The district had hired several off-duty police to be stationed outside the school building and auditorium during the forum, heightening the already tense situation. Approximately 15 to 20 Latino university students were present, and roughly 20 to 25 local minority community members (most of whom were Hispanics). Each speaker was given three minutes to state his or her views to the school board and the audience. Twenty-nine individuals spoke, including Euro-American senior citizens on the school board and from the community (7)[10], high school Latinos (5), university Latino students (7), minority community leaders (3), Euro-American religious leaders (2), and Euro-Americans in the middle ages range (4), three of whom spoke in support of minority proposals.

The conflict that was initially played out at this public forum and the school board meetings remained front-page news for several weeks, and a heated topic of debate in "letters to the editor" and on the local radio talk shows for several months. The senior population wielded considerable power locally, and their spokespersons were regularly consulted by the local media for their opinions, due to their voting power; their claim to legitimacy as community spokespersons (they were "born and raised here"); and their control of the school board and power in local government. The Hispanic population, with little power locally, received support from

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[10]Several of the speakers were regular local radio talk show callers and members of the "Arnhem Study Group," formed by Marris in 1989 to explore ways to reduce school taxes. This group had been instrumental in organising the senior citizen population for the last school board election and controlled the majority of votes on the board. When two board members later called for Marris' resignation, the board voted six to three not to remove him.

Latino students from the nearby state university campus who had become interested in the debate. In response to letters from spokespersons for the Hispanic and African American community, the New York State Education Department also became involved, sending a team of investigators to look into the charges that the educational needs of minority (in particular Hispanic) students were not being adequately met.

As is often the case, local participants and the media both framed the two sides as being in polar opposition to one another[11], (Euro-American) "seniors" on one side and "Hispanics," (or oftentimes "minorities"), on the other. While each side attempted to represent themselves as speaking for all of its members, we do not assume that to have been the case. It is the most vocal members, those who gained the ear of the media and attempted to win others over to their side, whose voices emerge in this analysis. The term "Seniors," when capitalized, will represent their public presentation of group sentiments while "Minorities" will be used to represent the collective view put forward by the minority (mostly Latino) spokespersons (again, without an assumption that their perspectives were universally shared by members of the Hispanic and African American community). The significance of these differing frameworks will then be examined in order to assess possible ramifications for the future of educational policies designed to address the needs of minority youth.

Analysis

Discourse analytic techniques were used in the process of constructing and making sense of the competing visions that the participants in the debate put forward. Based on the assumption that the personal narratives we construct and select to tell from our past can reveal significant underlying premises that bear upon our present interpretation of events, narratives from both seniors and minority (Latino and African American) speakers were analyzed. Narratives were closely examined along with other public texts--speeches made at the public forum, interviews, letters to the editor, and radio talk show callers' comments--in order to pull out the recurring themes in the public discourse. A close reading of the texts indicates the existence of recurrent topics in Seniors' and Minorities' discourse, which are taken to be indicative of content areas significant to the speakers and to reveal the semiotic building blocks of the conceptual framework through which they made sense of their worlds (Agar, 1983; Woolard, 1989). The recurring themes running through the community discourse engendered by the conflict were examined in an attempt to construct the interpretive frameworks through which participants understood the

[11]Largely missing from the public discourse were the views of younger Euro-Americans in the community, as well as the sentiments of nonpolitically active minority community members.

conflict and the community's responses. The emotionally charged meaning of certain events, practices, and people within the context of this debate also emerged from observation of public events and analysis of community discourse, and the Seniors' and Minorities' different meanings are pointed out.

Storytelling: Narratives of Identity. Several of the texts from which the excerpts used in this analysis are taken contain anecdotes that serve as valuable pieces in the construction of the interpretative frameworks of the groups. The stories we construct from the past events of our lives, and our re-constructions of the stories we hear growing up, are important mechanisms for revealing our "presentation of self," both to ourselves and to others (cf. Benmayor, Juarbe, Vasquez Erazo, & Alvarez, 1988; Goffman, 1959). The stories we tell help us organize and make sense of our world and where we fit into it. They also have strategic value, as we attempt to move others to see our own visions of ourselves and our world, and to make sense of and affirm our positions in it. Within the context of the public debate outlined above, they functioned in a number of ways, including (a) to strike a resonant chord with like-minded people, resulting in confirmation of the speaker's worldview and the degree to which it is shared; (b) to differentiate the "Other" from the speaker and his or her group; (c) as a encoded moral lesson in proper ways of "being," and (d) as a way of explaining the present.

Let us begin by looking at two representative narratives in order to develop a sense of the contrasting perspectives being articulated in public texts. The Senior perspective is visible in a "letter to the editor" printed in the local paper, written by a Polish American senior citizen who has been a lifelong Arnhem resident, and who regularly contributes to the "letters to the editor" column in the local press. The Minority perspective is revealed through analysis of a personal narrative told by a local Hispanic leader at the public forum on Hispanic educational needs, where she spoke in support of calls for a school district more responsive to Hispanic students' needs.

The Senior "letter to the editor" narrative appeared in the *Arnhem Record*[12] on September 30, 1991, following two months of angry charges and countercharges in the local paper and the school board meetings:

To the editor:

There is no need to debate or question which language should be spoken in these United States as the universal language. It is to the benefit of all nationalities to speak

[12]The name of the newspaper has been changed to preserve the anonymity of the community, and therefore does not appear in the references. Names of all individuals have also been changed.

English, so that all can understand each other.

All early immigrants and all later immigrants to the present immigrated to this country for some of the best reasons. To escape tyranny and oppression and a need to enjoy freedom and religion of our choice. America opened the doors and accepted all.

With them also came the undesirable element of individuals.

The craftsmen, the ambitious, planned and built America. They had no designs to become dominant. They faced ridicule and name calling and survived. They stood back to back and shoulder to shoulder, swinging pick, shovel, hammer and ax. They broke garden land with a mattock. All worked on land and in factories for a few coins per hour. They built America amongst racism (it isn't modern to be racist) it came with the immigrants.

They asked for nothing. They spoke their native tongue in their homes, communities and business places. They had no modern schools, they learned to speak English from their co-workers at places of work and streets.

My mother taught me to read and write Polish as a child at home. She sent me to a one-room schoolhouse to learn to read, write and spell English; to add, subtract and multiply so that no one would cheat me.

My father taught me never to apologize for telling the truth. Wrong would find itself out. My mother taught me to never be ashamed of my nationality or language. Many times I have been asked by my foreman in a factory to bean interpreter for an immigrant looking for work. I was taught to never think I am better than my friend, be he black or white.

America wasn't discovered. The Indians were already here. All early explorers found these true Americans, the red race, and took away their land by force. Today the Indian nation speaks English. Their native tongue (I presume) they speak among themselves and at their tribal conferences.

No nationality here in America should feel superior. According to the Bible we are all children of God who will not judge us by color or nationality but on our deeds throughout our life.

It should be essential that all immigrants go to school to learn English, so they can read and write, to vote and converse with their fellowmen from many nations. All immigrants came to America to make a home and find a way of life. Let us respect our temporary residence here on Earth.

Let us be mindful that if language becomes an issue, there will be hard feelings amongst all and this will be America no more. There will be the danger of dividing these United States into sections like Europe. Stand together and be an immigrant American under one God, one government, one flag and one universal language - English. Many speak English the world over.

Let us lay aside our personal enmities. Watch our children fight one day and play games together tomorrow. They are the children of God with a loving and forgiving heart. Let adults follow their example.

Thomas J. Bronowski, Arnhem, RD 2

By way of responding to Hispanics' demands for a bilingual education program in the schools--though the author never explicitly mentions such programs by name--the author presents a romantic vision of earlier (European) immigrants, to which he negatively contrasts, largely by implication, current (Hispanic) (im)migrants. He begins by making a truth claim that English must be the universal language of the nation if we are to be able to communicate with one another, a commonsense proposition that does not appear to conflict with Hispanics' desires for bilingual programs. The author then goes on, in prose that appeals to patriotic sentiments, to paint immigrants in the ways our history texts have long portrayed them: in search of freedom, hard working, asking only for a chance to support their families, suffering abuse and discrimination in silence in the hopes of building a better life and nation for the benefit of their children (lines 13-24). His own parents stand in for other immigrant parents, who took the time to teach their children the proper values (lines 25-34). We see throughout the author's text widely recognized and shared American symbols: the immigrant "muscle" and self-sacrifice that built the nation; the "one-room schoolhouse" of bygone days, when all was right with the nation; the English language as a symbol of national unity.

It is by initially mentioning immigrants past and present (lines 5-8), but only attributing such virtues to the earlier groups, made clear by the use of past tense (e.g., line 21) and reference to bygone days (e.g., lines 23-24), that the author sets up a contrast between past and present-day immigrants. That contemporary immigrants do not possess such characteristics becomes even more apparent when he shifts to discussion of present-day immigrants (lines 46-58), using the present and future tense. If "it should be essential that all immigrants go to school to learn English..." (lines 46-48) then immigrants today, by implication, must not be doing so. Lines 53-54 suggest that there has been no valid reason for minorities to be bitter about their experiences here and that their actions are destroying the nation. Unlike immigrants of the past, he implies, today's immigrants come expecting too much, making too much out of discrimination, asking for special favors, trying to change the country (language) rather than accept it and find ways to fit in. We may possibly infer that lines 11-12 and 41-42, their reference ambiguous, are intended to refer to the present day immigrants. Finally, by referring to the local Hispanics as "immigrants," though 80% are Puerto Ricans (all of whom are U.S. citizens and many of them second and third generation mainlanders), the author locates the Puerto Rican population as newcomers, and

therefore a group which has yet to earn its place and be accepted into American society as earlier groups have had to do. In his closing paragraph, he asks "us" to "lay aside our personal enmities." Given the preceding text, those acting on their "personal enmities" appear to be the community's Latino population.

A close reading of the text also reveals that, behind the author's initial statement in support of English as the universal language, are several unspoken presuppositions underlying the logic of his text. In the body of the letter, the author argues that native languages should be taught and maintained only in the privacy of the home and ethnic community (lines 25-28; 36-41); *even the Indians*, wronged as they were by white settlers, speak English in public and their native tongues in private. Choosing to make language an issue--what Hispanics are doing, the group which he never directly mentions--will divide the nation's people and destroy America (lines 55-58). What is implicit, then, is the assumption that an intended outcome of bilingual education programs is the strengthening of the use of Spanish to the point where it is accepted as a suitable alternative to English, thus pre-empting the status of English as the "universal language"; and that acceptance and support for maintenance of speakers' Spanish language abilities cannot coexist with acceptance of English as the "universal language." Hispanics, by making demands for bilingual programs, are threatening national unity, symbolized by the "*one* God, *one* government, *one* flag and *one* universal language" (lines 56-58, italics added).

Standing in stark contrast to this writer's vision is the perspective expressed by one of the local Hispanic community leaders; her narrative paints a picture of the exclusion of minorities, and asks the listener to consider the consequences for America's children and future. Hispanics' actions and goals are linked to the loftiest of American ideals[13] (see also Appendix for complete transcription conventions):

> My name is Virginia Colón and I'd like to thank you all for having this forum here tonight. (0.5) It's a very necessary forum. (1.0) Primeramente, quiero empezar por decirles que hay MÁS gente en los Estados Unidos que hablan espanol que muchísimos países (1) ((applause, (6.0))). En fin, el derecho (.) ajeno (.) es la obligación de todos (.) incluídos ustedes que están presentes aquí esta noche. [*First, I want to begin by telling you that there are MORE people who speak Spanish in the United States than in many countries. So, the obligation of all, to respect others, includes you who are present here tonight.*] (1.0) You know (.) I used to live in Kansas (.2) and I remember the first time I went to a restaurant

[13] Words in CAPS were emphasized in oral presentations, and brackets [] contain information clarifying speaker's reference or intent.

and I ordered my usual BLT (0.2) I love BLTs I have a passion for BLTs (0.2) and the waitress told me (.) I'm sorry we don't serve niggers here you'll have to go. (.5) and I left (.) because I knew I had to go. (2.0) And I wondered throughout my time that I was in Kansas. (.2) and I experienced more and more of those things as time went along (.) what happens to kids who DID?n't have the skills that I had to get through that time. (1.0) and what happened to the kids who were my age that learned the skills to talk to me that way. (2.0) Those are the kinds of things that OUR kids are going through today. (.5) and those are the kinds of things that we're asking YOU to help us help them with. (1.0) It's enCUM:bent upon us all to do that. (2.0) You know (.) people have labeled this discussion as HOS:tile.(.2) IT'S NOT HO:STILE. (1.0) This is called "DI: alogue. (2.0) People have labeled this (.) the things that we've asked of you as (.) RA:cial preference. (1.0) It's called diVERsity. (2.0) People have gone as far to label it "UNaME:Rican. (.5) It's demoCRATic (.) and this is the aMERican way.(.5) It's the foundations that this country has been built on. (2.0) Someone made very biased remarks (.5) very hateful remarks against a large ethnic group in this community. (1.0) Let's continue to DIalogue. (.5) Let's respond to what these people are saying. (.5) But most of all (.) let's LISten (.) because that's not HAPpening here. We are not LIStening. (1.0) And every time I hear a student have to come up here and say to someone (.) that I am an aMERican (.) it's because we once again are not included. (2.0) Let's be inclusive. (1.0) Let's make sure that a:ll of these kids here, and a:ll of us here today represent EACH star on that flag. (2.0) And let's try to come together to find a conclusion to this BOOK that is opened (.5) this yet a:nOTHer chapter in our history that is opened. (2.0) And please remember (.) as I said in the beginning (.5) el respeto ajeno es la obligación de TOdos [*it's everyone's obligation to respect others*]. ((Hispanic audience applauds wildly, 9.0 seconds))

The speaker begins her narrative by switching to Spanish, emblematic of her identification with the Hispanic members of the audience and of the right to use Spanish in public discourse and to "be" simultaneously Hispanic and American. Her message is never repeated in English and is meant for the ears of Spanish speakers, though it addresses, on the surface, the Seniors. It stakes out the claim that Hispanics are here in force, they needn't apologize for who they are, and they are entitled to respect. (The Hispanics in the audience wildly applauded her Spanish language segment, while the Seniors muttered among themselves and understood her choice to use Spanish as excluding them.) "Kansas" and "BLTs" are quintessentially "American"; the narrative paints a picture of Hispanics who can be different and at the same time as "American" as the nation's heartland and BLTs. It also depicts Latinos as being forced to confront the ugliness of racism in their most formative years, to feel that they have been cast out of the group. The speaker's eager anticipation and innocence upon entering the restaurant are juxtaposed to the ugliness and

exclusion she encounters, symbolic of the (im)migrants' anticipation of life in the U.S.A. and their encounters with the reality of racism. Using alliteration for greater impact--"dialogue," "diversity," "democracy"--she puts forward a reinterpretation of the events that Seniors have condemned, turning a positive light on them. She concludes with an appeal to patriotism, to all that the American flag, a commonly evoked symbol, represents.

Visible in these narratives then are the outlines of two very different propositions about "being" and "becoming" American. For the Seniors, the latest "immigrants'" stories ought to be interchangeable with those of earlier immigrants. To do otherwise is to undermine the nation's well-being, to be unsuited to the challenge of becoming real "Americans." For Minorities, their story, and consequently their way of "being" American, is their own, setting them in important ways apart from Euro-Americans. These differing worldviews, in turn, have profound consequences in the struggles over what gets included in the curricula of the school, a point we shall return to later on.

To further explicate the differences between the two groups, let us turn to analysis of the key themes, symbols, and metaphors utilized by each side in the public debate, as they attempted to move both their own constituencies and others to action. As will be evident in the analysis, Seniors dominated the discourse, for instance writing more letters to the local paper and regularly calling in on local talk shows. They thus provided a plethora of materials articulating their perspectives that contrasts with the relative paucity of the Hispanic public discourse.

Senior Perspectives

While minority community leaders viewed the comments by Marris (the school board member being censured) as an opportunity to gain the public's attention and recognition of the need to change the ways the schools were dealing with minority youth, Seniors used their public outcry and the concomitant attention it received as an opportunity to censure the minorities (overwhelmingly Hispanic in Arnhem), not only for their "rowdy" public protests and their "harping" on the issue of racism, but also their "gimme, gimme" attitudes and lack of success in the local schools and community. John Marris became the symbol of the "white" population being scapegoated by minorities for what were ultimately the minorities' doings. A cryptic "letter to the editor," published a month after Marris' original comments, encapsulated their position:

> The musical, *The Music Man*, there was a song about trouble in River City. The trouble has moved to the 'Rug City.' The time for the silent majority to be heard is now. We are not going to let Mr. Marris become the victim of a "witch hunt." (The Arnhem Record,

September 25, 1991)

Recurring throughout the public discourse was the constant use of terms that set minorities apart from "mainstream" Americans. Seniors spoke of "those people,""yous," and "you people" for instance, in ways that markedly contrasted minorities unfavorably with "us (American) people," useage which was frequently remarked upon by minority community members. The dichotomy persisted throughout the texts, and is visible through analysis of the major themes repeatedly occurring in Senior discourse.

Thematic Analysis. Several major interrelated themes emerge from analysis of the public discourse of Seniors, then, within which Hispanics and, to a limited extent, African Americans were contrasted unfavorably to Euro-Americans. The quotes below are representative of public pronouncements over the three month period following Marris' original statements and are grouped into several themes. (Some could be placed under more than one theme and illustrate the interrelatedness of the themes.) All statements were made by seniors in the community, who are overwhelmingly of southern and eastern European origin.

Theme 1: **Assimilation Keeps America Strong**. Throughout the public texts, Seniors voiced support for cultural and linguistic assimilation, maintaining that their own parents had publicly abandoned their homeland culture and language for the greater good. Hispanics, the newest immigrants, were censured for their alleged refusal to conform to the culture and language of the nation, which Seniors claimed was necessary for American unity. If there *is* any bias against Hispanics, they asserted, they bring it on themselves by being anti-assimilationist. Representative statements include the following, excerpted from Seniors' texts:

> **Speaker #4, senior Jewish-American school board member speaking at the public forum on education:** Keep your heritage and language, speak Spanish at home or with your friends, but learn to speak English in school and the outside world if you want to succeed. [Loud applause from Senior section of audience] Whether you like it or not, this IS an English speaking country... I myself am learning Spanish because I want to. You have to WANT to learn English. (September 25, 1991)
>
> **Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*:** If these folks [Hispanic students flying the Puerto Rican flag] are proud of this country, why not display the American flag and maybe things won't get polarized in our community. (September 28, 1991)
>
> **Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*:** The promotion of multiculturalism as public policy is antithetical to our national ideal of unity through cultural assimilation.... One

need only witness the problems, the notoriously ethnocentric, acculturation resistant Hispanics have entering the American mainstream, to realize this [revising the social studies curriculum to make it more inclusive] is indeed a flawed policy initiative. (July 28, 1991)

Caller to local talk show, discussing local Hispanics: They refuse to join in, here, in a lot of things. They come here, they want their own ways, they want to change our ways. And our ways is our ways, and if they want their own ways, they should go back to wherever they came from. (September 24, 1991)

Theme 2: **"Attitude" Problem.** Senior texts frequently portrayed Hispanics as lacking in motivation and expecting handouts, standing in their minds in sharp contrast to Seniors' parents, who they felt had worked hard to make this city (country) great and asked for nothing they had not earned:

Talk show caller: Enough is enough with the "gimme, gimme" attitude and "you owe me" attitude [of minorities]. I've had it. (September 26, 1991)

Speaker #8, speaking at the public forum: This room should of been loaded with people, Hispanics and whites. It should of been loaded, but evidently it isn't, why? Because they're [implied Hispanics] not interested. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #13, speaking at public forum: Arnhem is a wonderful city and affords many opportunities to everybody who wants them [but]... how are you ever going to be anything if you don't have an education? ...I can't understand why the Hispanic population doesn't WANT to be educated.... Do you think that those people [European immigrants] were just handed everything. NO, they worked hard. They had to learn to speak English. (September 25, 1991)

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*: [Hispanics] seem to feel that they are owed something.... [They should] exercise their rights and return to their native homeland. America, love it or leave it. (September 17, 1991)

Theme 3: **Equivalence of Experience/Denial of Bias.** Hispanics were repeatedly censured for making "a big to-do" about discrimination. Seniors responded to charges of racism by: denying the existence of bias; claiming they and their parents had faced similar bias and not "whined" about it; putting forward an argument that it was no different here in Arnhem than anywhere else; and/or claiming that minorities brought it on themselves by adhering to their old ways and to each other:

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*: To orchestrate an attempt at his [John Marris'] ouster is a classic example of an overreaction by a hypersensitive minority to a small and imagined slight. (September 28, 1991)

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record:* But where were the voices when my ethnic group was being demeaned, laughed at and called dumb names? ...As I see it, both Jimmy the Greek and Marris are victims of circumstance. Saying what came to mind, but never thinking it would come out the way it did, it seems to me... Mr. Marris will never live it down, the people won't let him. And that is unfortunate, too. (September 9, 1991)

"Guest Column" author, *The Arnhem Record:* Certainly we all agree these incidents [throwing racial epithets at minority students] are cruel and worthy of our contempt, but are they racist? Do these incidents reveal a hidden racist undercurrent in Arnhem? Actually I would contend that these acts are more the product of anger and frustration than of any overt bigotry. In each of the cases above the students were placing themselves right in the middle of what had become a controversial issue; and often time controversy sparks angry name calling.... The fact is that we have no more prejudice or racism than you will find in any similar community. (October 1, 1991)

Local talk show, caller #7: As far as this racial thing goes, I received a letter from my sister in Rochester, and the same thing is going on. And a lot of this is the fact that YOU people REFUSE to LEARN the language... you are demanding that the classes be held in Spanish. What is wrong here.... Where are the parents? (September 24, 1991)

Local talk show, caller #2: If the Marris deal hadn't come up, would you people - I shouldn't say "you people' - would you people, the people that are against Mr. Marris... would there still be a problem [i.e. charges of racism here in the city]? (September 24, 1991)

Speaker #4, Senior board member speaking at public forum: Some Hispanic students have complained about cracks thrown at them.... All nationalities go through the same experience. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #15, retired teacher speaking at public forum: If there's been racism in Arnhem school district, maybe I'm naive, I don't know about it. I didn't feel it... Any ethnic group that came to Arnhem, like Father said, no matter what you do there's always gonna be some prejudice.... The Italians were called guineas and wops, so what's new, what's the difference. (September 25, 1991)

Local talk show caller #5, responding to question posed by guest host, an African American community leader:
Q.(guest host) Do you think bias exists in this community toward various ethnic groups?
A.(caller) I DO not. I DO not.
Q. You don't think there's maybe one person, or two persons in this community who may be racist?...
A. I don't think so. No. (September 24, 1991)

Local talk show, caller #4: When I was goin' to school I'd go "Oh you dumb Pollock, you guinea, you dumb wop" or this or that. We never had discrimination... The more you people are on this, the more the pot is boiling. (September 24, 1991)

Local talk show, caller #7, speaking to talk show guest host; caller has insinuated that the guest speaker must be making up charges of racism against her and her daughter:
Guest host: Do you believe, when I say that my child has been called a nigger in this community, do you think that that is possible that that did happen?
Caller: It may be possible, but let me tell you something. Just like the one lady said, they were all - what are the Italian people called? Grease balls, wops, and everything like that.
Guest: Does that make it right?
Caller: No it doesn't make it right, but did they make a big fuss over it, and have trouble in the community over it...?
Caller: I think it's been carried too far.... I think it's turning a lot of people that did like the Costa Ricans, the Puerto Ricans,the Hispanics, I think it's turning them the other way a lot. (September 24, 1991)

Theme 4: **Public Comportment.** Closely related to Theme 3, this theme spoke to public behaviors. Hispanics were portrayed as rowdy and out of line picketing and raising a ruckus over issues of racism. Their behavior is portrayed as harming both the community as well as ethnic relations.

Speaker #4, addressing public forum: You have a right to protest. But you also have an obligation to live peacefully within the rest of the community. So to sit down and discuss in a quiet manner.... Wild cat demonstrations are not the way. They only tend to polarize the community and make a gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #8, addressing public forum: [Have] meetings, but let's keep it quiet, let's keep it to ourselves. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #9, addressing public forum: Now I notice today, all the rowdies aren't here. The Hispanic community is well behaved today ((muttering from Hispanic community)) not like they were, not like they were on the last board meeting, with signs and everything else.... I sympathize with you people, but not when you're rowdy. Not when you're cracking up. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker at school board meeting: The board should come to an amicable agreement so at every meeting it isn't a mob like this against Americans like me--although you people [Hispanics] are Americans. (Meeting September 4, 1991; quoted in *The Arnhem Recorder* September 5, 1991)

Talk show caller #6: He [Marris] presented, unfortunately, the excuse for YOU PEOPLE to break loose. And you have done that. And I think that you might better use your energies, your efforts, toward making a better city, and a better living. Now, I have seen thousands of people come into this city, grew up with Polish, Italian, played with them, never went into their homes, knew my place. They made great citizens.... I'm American for going on 400 years. And very proud of it.... There's some great people among your people, but they do not agree, and they are not taking part in it. (September 24, 1991)

Theme 5: **Insider/Outsider**. Seniors characterized government agencies and people 'from outside the city (i.e. other Hispanics) as outsiders, non-family, who have no business involving themselves in the community's affairs. Minorities prolong their "outsider" status because of their behavior.

Speaker #4, school board member, public forum: I do NOT want to listen to anyone here tonight [referring to Latino university students in the audience] who is not from the Arnhem Central School District. We are a family... and this is a family matter. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #8, addressing public forum: [Directed at Hispanics] Let's keep it quiet, let's keep it to ourselves.... Arnhem is a good place to work. Arnhem is a good place to live. (September 25, 1991)

Theme 6: **Dividing and Destroying Arnhem/USA**. Euro-Americans, according to Seniors, made this city (and nation) great. The actions of minorities are destroying all that they worked so hard for.

Letter written to Hispanic community activists and read at school board meeting: [You

people are responsible for] 90 percent of all troubles in Arnhem... you people aren't wanted here - go get welfare somewhere else. (September 4, 1991)

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*: [This uproar over Marris] is an unproductive, and ultimately divisive and hurtful discussion of prejudice and racism. (October 1, 1991)

Speaker at school board meeting: The same people trying to get him [Marris] out are the ones you see in the police report every night in the paper. (September 4, 1991)

John Marris, letter to the editor of *The Arnhem Record*: Uneducated millions [in Latin America] are risking their lives to cross borders in hope of a better life up here, while North Americans fear loss of their own jobs while trying to pay for better education for all. (August 9, 1991)

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record:* Today's immigrants legal and illegal come to American open hearts (sic), for they are told America is a free country and so it is under our welfare system heavily shouldered by the American taxpayers.... The economy, as it is, is not only the fault of our leaders but the fault of all those who demand that the government owes us a living. Our oldsters remember how we made our own way and shouldered our own problems. Arnhem factories were a beehive of activity decades past. One could quit a job one day then find another the next day. (January 12, 1992)

Talk show caller #6: Having been born and brought up here, and having lived here for many years, and saw a lovely area (sic), a lovely city, and my heart is broke to see what is going on. People, thousands came into this city, they came because of the industry. They made a living. They - they built beautiful homes, owned homes, worked hard for that purpose. And they kept the city nice. And kept it along. Why do the Latinos, as they like to be called I believe, and the minorities, why did they flock in here? Again, do you realize HOW much is being taken out of the taxpayers' pockets, to teach so many of your people. This is - uh - part of the sore part. (September 24, 1991)

Letter to the editor, *The Arnhem Record*: Arnhem is being held up, stripped of its dignity, and subjected to an unwarranted inquisition by a gang of activist zealots [minority leaders and the State Education Department], some with their own vengeful agenda. Based on mainly anecdotal evidence, this cabal of minority women have built a bonfire of racism, bigotry and prejudice where scarcely a flicker of flame actually exists... their rabble-rousing accusations [to the State Education Department] have sullied the good name of the entire community.... [The State Education Department] if they're unbiased, [will]...

> vindicate the one-time Rug City's stellar reputation and restore the historically unblemished record of friendship, tolerance and harmony Arnhemites have always lived by. (October 26, 1991)

Senior Symbols. Within the course of the debate, it became apparent that particular events, practices, and people took on diametrically opposed meanings for the two sides. Reference to these emotionally charged events, practices and people encoded a set of meanings that acted as a sort of "shorthand" to permit the speaker to quickly gain audience support in his or her attempt to move people to action. These references, symbolizing different things to each side, emerged from in-depth analysis of a videotape of the public forum, tapes of radio shows, and observation at public meetings. The differing meanings, in turn, help us to make sense of each side's interpretive framework:

John Marris. Symbol of white Americans wrongly under attack by minorities, scapegoated by them when the real problems rest within the minority communities.

Spanish language. Symbol of unwillingness of Hispanics to "assimilate." Language of exclusion; public use of it symbolizes the speaker's intent to exclude nonSpanish speakers. Metonymically, it stands in for the decline of the U.S. in recent decades as a result of the entry of "mobs" of illegals and other foreigners "swamping" the country and turning it into a "jungle."

State Education Department. [Called in by minority community members to investigate charges of racism in the schools] Symbol of "big government," meddling by outsiders, loss of control of state and federal institutions to minorities.

Hispanic (higher) dropout rate. Symbol of Hispanic community's lack of caring about their children.

Bilingual education, Multicultural education. Symbol of how far U.S. had "gone down the wrong track" to "cater" to the demands of minority communities; symbol of state's institutions "butting in."

Metaphors. Metaphors that acted to situate the minority community negatively were frequently utilized by Senior speakers. As Fernandez (1986) emphasizes, metaphors are significant in the process of defining others in relation to ourselves:

> Language has devices of representation at its disposal, mainly metaphor, by which pronouns can be moved about--into better or worse position--in quality space.... There is an important social use of metaphor involving the occupancy of various continua which in sum constitute a cultural quality space. Persuasive metaphors situate us and others with whom we interact in that space. (pp. 13-14)

Seniors "situated" themselves at the opposite ends from Hispanics on a variety of continua

which, taken together, constitute what they defined as important domains of experience in American society. The Seniors' metaphors operated to place minorities (Hispanics and African Americans, with Asian Americans never acknowledged) in an unfavorable light, implying by metaphoric predication that they were endangering the community (national) well-being. Minorities for instance were "holding up" Arnhem and "stripping" it of its dignity; they were using Marris' comments as an opportunity to "break loose;" they held "wild cat demonstrations," they were "cracking up." Minorities had "broke" their (Seniors'/Americans') hearts, welfare was a "sore spot." Hispanics, such metaphors suggested, were improperly socialized and harmful to community well-being.

One of the recurring metaphors used by Seniors cast Arnhemites as "family." Seniors repeatedly put forward the statement that "we are family" and that "Arnhem is a wonderful place to live." Minorities/Hispanics were censured for going public with their complaints, thus taking "family" matters into the public domain and in the process blemishing the reputation of the city. Their actions made them "not family."

Conceptual Framework of Seniors. Seniors, then, put forward as a universal model for incorporation into the American mainstream what they perceived to have worked for them. Their model (see Figure 1) drew (sometimes contradictorily) upon both what social scientists have variously termed an "assimilationist," "Anglo-conformity," or "melting pot" model, taken for so long as the appropriate metaphor to describe the "making" of the American people and upon the self-conscious assertions of ethnic pride that reflect the "new ethnicity" appearing among Euro-Americans by the 1970s (Novak, 1971). *Conformity, accepting hard knocks,* and *hard work* are the ingredients that ensure *success*, which is ultimately what *made Arnhem great*; with *success* also comes *acceptance* as an *American*.

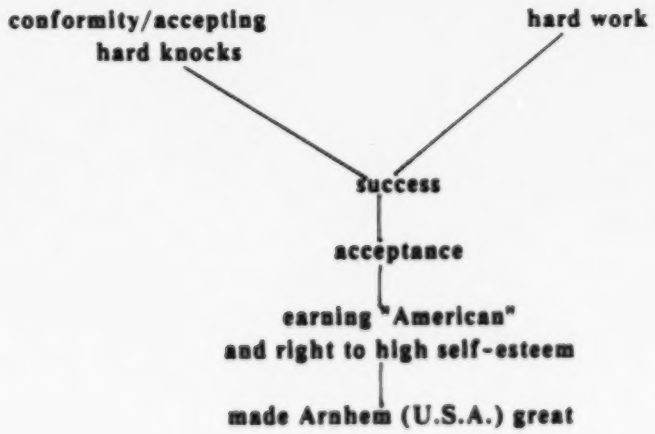

Figure 1: Seniors' Conceptual Framework for Incorporation into American Mainstream

We see in their arguments their claim to being Americans as rooted in the story they share of a struggling, self-sacrificing immigrant past and their own hard work, through which they and their children succeeded in achieving social mobility (and by extension, national greatness). As Alba's sociological study (1990) of ethnic identity among whites in the adjoining metropolitan areas suggests, ethnicity for Euro-Americans continues to be salient, but what we are witnessing is the original ethnic divisions among those of European descent being replaced by a "Euro-American" identity, with emphasis on the shared immigrant experience and social mobility as setting them apart from "non-white" ethnic groups. It is an identity that, for some Seniors, grows out of their experiences as first and second-generation ethnics; for others, as for many of their children (including in this community many of the teachers), ethnic identity has increasingly become unmoored from social structural conditions that give rise to identification as ethnics (e.g., ethnic neighborhoods, work sites, nonEnglish languages in the home), and is better understood as a "symbolic ethnicity" (Gans, 1979). As will become apparent, this Euro-American "national origin myth" (Alba, 1990) contrasts sharply with the stories being put forward by minority spokespersons, and has important ramifications for curriculum choices in the schools.

Taking the model depicted in Figure 1, then, as their basis for evaluating the minority community, Seniors positioned minorities as operating from the opposite, and negative ends of the various continua (Figure 2). The actions of minorities, as seen by Seniors, helped explain troubling changes in the U.S.A. in their lifetimes as well as the lower socioeconomic and educational status of minority groups. For minorities:

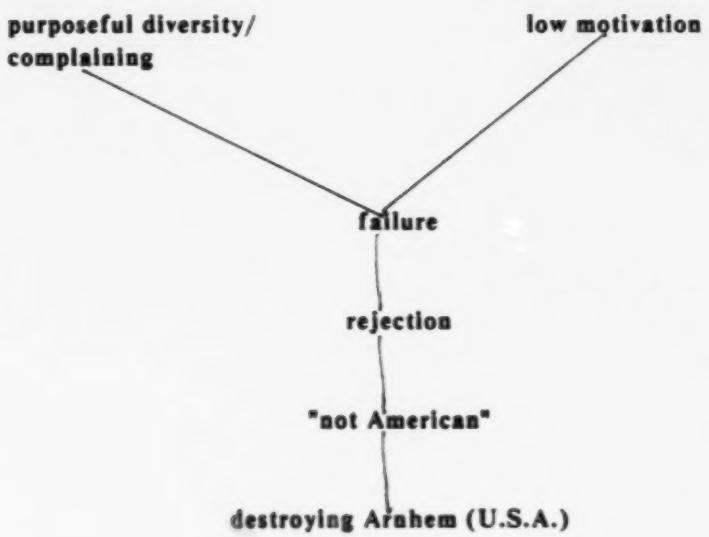

Figure 2: Seniors' Conceptual Framework for Minorities' Failure to Succeed

Minority Perspecitves

Minorities came back with a counterclaim. Analysis of their discourse reveals a contrasting interpretation: Their failure to succeed was rooted in the nation's racism and exclusion of their language and culture, which they maintained to be their entitlement as Americans--an entitlement based on the values on which the nation was founded.

Thematic Analysis. The themes of (a) the U.S. as benefiting from its diversity, (b) minority rights to "difference," and (c) the long history of racism and exclusion that had acted to hold minorities back, recurred throughout Minority speeches and writings. The numbers of local Minority spokespersons speaking out were small, however, in contrast to the numbers of vocal Seniors. Hispanic spokespersons connected to the Hispanic community agency active in the dispute, the New York State Education Department, and the state university's Latino student community, generally articulated positions on bilingual and multicultural education shared by much of the Puerto Rican academic community based in New York City (cf. Vázquez, 1989) and by supporters of versions of multicultural education that have as an important objective the empowerment of minority youth and communities (Banks, 1991; Cortes, 1991; Cummins, 1986).

Theme 1: **Difference as Entitlement.** Diversity was portrayed as a positive quality, something that minorities were entitled to, and something they should be proud of:

> **Speaker #7, Latino SUNY student speaking at public forum:** Nowhere in the U.S. Constitution is English the official language. Okay, Our forefathers, well the people who made this country, almost made the official language German or Yiddish, because they hated the English so much. And um, they left it open so that people who wanted to come to this country, didn't have to worry about speaking English to fit in. They could just come and be. The "English Only" movement in this country, is only gonna damage the greater culture of the United States, 'cause we're such a mixture of many, many cultures. (September 25, 1991)

> **Hispanic community agency leader interviewed by local paper:** I think we should learn from other ethnic minorities who regret that they can't speak their native language, whether it is Polish, Italian or Lithuanian. We don't want our children to have that same regret. (September 10, 1991)

Theme 2: **Racism as Damaging.** The racism experienced by minorites is qualitatively different from that earlier groups have known. Prejudice, discrimination, and insensitivity have historically held minorities back.

> **Speaker #14 at public forum, local Latino high school student:** The self-esteem of Hispanic students is suffering in our schools, because we hear every day of negative messages about who we are and why we are here. We want to feel good about ourselves, we want to achieve.... We want to organize as a group because we as Hispanics want to be able to support each other... (to) deal with the prejudice we encountered constructively. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #24 at public forum, local Latino high school student: I would like to say that I am very proud of what I am. [Loud applause from Latinos in the audience] I am in the tenth grade, and I have been to the last couple of meetings, and I have been called "nigger" and a couple of other words that I don't care to repeat. But I don't understand, if everyone here want the children of the community to succeed, why are you continuously putting us down. (September 25, 1991)

Speaker #18 at public forum, SUNY student, Latino: I have a proposal from the students at the University, and I would like to read that. "We... would like to propose that a stronger, cultural oriented curriculum be formulated for the purpose of educating and alleviating racial tension. We, as an oppressed people...." (September 25, 1991)

Theme 3: **Exclusion.** Minorities don't feel included, even though they are as American as anybody else. White America excludes them and treats them as the Other, damaging their self-esteem.

Speaker #19 at public forum, Latino university student: After the (1991 Gulf) War, everybody wrapped themselves around the American flag right there. Everybody, even we did, okay. For you to come here and tell us that we're not Americans, and for you to expect us to listen to Mr. Marris here, and his remarks, and then after that, expect Latinos to wrap ourselves around the American flag, then maybe you have to analyze yourselves.... Just stand up and support the idea of Latinos.

Hispanic community organization leader, interviewed by local paper: "Schools should start incorporating ethnic contributions immediately," Colón said. "Without that information, children are handicapped--they are defenseless--and information about their heritage is needed to arm them.... If they hear nothing about their people's contributions, then they think, 'I must be nothing,'" Colón said. (July 28, 1991)

Symbols. Analysis of the various public texts of minority speakers and writers indicates that mention of particular people, actions, events, practices and the like evoked strong emotional responses from minority audience members that differed sharply from Senior responses as outlined above:

John Marris. Symbol of whites' insensitivity and biased attitudes toward minority community.

Spanish language. Symbol of ethnic identity, affirmation of selves, code for "in-group" membership.

State Education Department: Symbol of the "proper" role of government, to serve as a watchdog agency to protect minority rights and guarantee their entitlements.

Hispanic (higher) dropout rate. Symbol of school and community failure to adequately educate minority youth.

Bilingual education, Multicultural education. Symbol of community's willingness to address their needs and wishes and to positively affirm their presence and value to the city (and nation).

Conceptual Framework. For Seniors, the gaps between the Hispanic and nonHispanic community--both in the sense of ethnic polarization and also economic/educational status--were brought on Hispanics by their own doing. Within the conceptual framework of minority leaders, causality is reversed: Student failure is rooted in bias and rejection that has its roots in their "Otherness" for white Americans. "Difference," a stigma according to the Seniors' framework, is inverted to become a positive factor, an entitlement rooted in appeals to the American Constitution and the nation's longstanding espousal of the ideals of tolerance. Breaking the cycle for minority youth, then, requires a multi-pronged approach that severs the connections between *difference*, and *bias* and *rejection*, through education and use of the state's institutions (see Figure 3). The *low self-esteem* of minority youth, a consequence of their experiences with bias and rejection of their cultural and linguistic differences, can be countered through positive acknowledgment of minority cultures and languages and the sense of empowerment they will experience in understanding the roots of their group's low status in the U.S.A.:

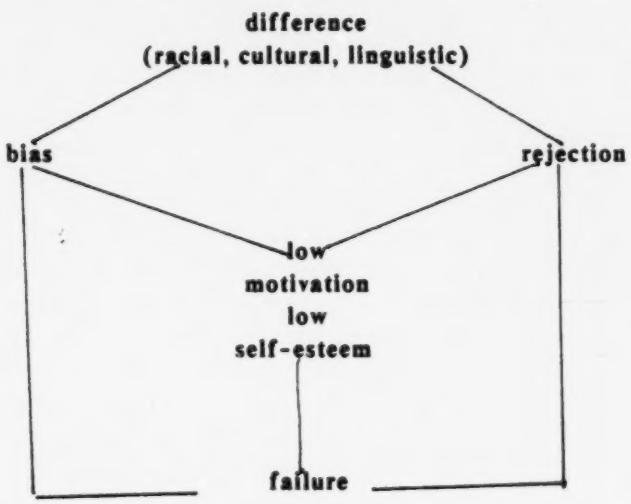

Figure 3: Minorites' Conceptual Framework for their Failure to Succeed

An integral element in such a schema is the advocacy of multicultural education programs that promote the desirability and legitimacy of linguistic and cultural diversity and make room for traditionally excluded "voices" and experiences in the various disciplines, including the social studies, art, and literature curriculums. While multicultural education has been variously defined, it is a "social reconstructionist" model (e.g. Sleeter & Grant, 1988), one which openly confronts the "disempowerment" of minority communities and students, that was implicitly viewed by minority speakers as capable of redressing their situatuations.

Teacher Talk

Given the political debate swirling around them both locally and nationally, it is instructive to ask how teachers perceived and responded to the situation in Arnhem. The second phase of the study draws upon observations and interviews in the local schools over a one-year period which coincided with the political upheaval in the larger community.

Caught up in the maelstrom created by Marris' remarks, teachers had much to say about the issues at hand, though they were as a whole reticent to become involved in the public debate. Untenured teachers in particular were reluctant to publicly take a stand on issues, fearful that they might offend school board members[14] and be denied tenure, a particularly frightening prospect at a time when teacher layoffs throughout the region had become commonplace in the face of budget constraints. Analysis of faculty room conversations, informal discussions, and interviews with teachers, however, reveals recurring themes that are relevant when attempting to understand teacher responses to the conflict and for evaluating prospects for success in implementing educational programs intended to improve minority performance.

The district has no Hispanic teachers, and only one African American teacher[15]. Most of the teaching staff and administration are drawn from the local population, and many are the first generation in their families to have achieved a college degree and moved into the middle class. As a whole, the faculty and administration were largely ignorant of the cultural backgrounds and distinctive historical experiences of their minority students (the overwhelming majority of whom were Puerto Rican), or the grim economic realities of life for many such students. Because of the "graying" of the teaching staff (a result of a declining student population and educational cutbacks), new teachers, who are more likely to have greater familiarity with multicultural education and the histories, contributions, and perspectives of people of color, were largely missing from the staff. Local teachers were generally unfamiliar with more recent works addressing the needs of minority students and with minority community academics' and leaders' perspectives on the educational needs of these youths.

Several key themes that have a direct bearing on the debates in the larger community emerged from analysis of faculty room conversations and interviews with staff members. Many perceived a decline in society's valuing of education, with students and parents failing to assume responsibility for the children's education; many felt they were "colorblind" in their interactions with students; and many saw themselves as scapegoated in the process of assigning responsibility for educational failure. Let us first begin with a story that was frequently repeated by school personnel in which these themes were reiterated.

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[14]The school board at this time had a reputation for favoritism and making arbitrary decisions. According to local talk, for instance, a custodian was denied appointment to the head position despite glowing recommendations because in the previous year, acting upon instructions from his superior to report the presence of any non-staff members in the school building after hours, he had turned in the name of one of the school board members.

[15]A male bilingual elementary principal from outside the community, of mixed Euro-American and Puerto Rican descent, was hired by the district for the 1992-1993 school year.

According to the story, an immigrant student from Hungary (or sometimes, Czechoslovakia or Costa Rica[16]) who had recently entered the school district had, within only months of being in this country, achieved enough fluency in the English language to be able to exit from the ESL classroom. Sometimes the story included the parents, who it was said intervened to pull him out of the ESL classes where everyone was reputed to be "fooling around" and learning nothing. The student, so the story goes, had then gone on to become an academic superstar at the high school[17].

The story was offered up when there was talk of the school's failure to be successful with minority students or discussion of Puerto Rican students' behavior. The researcher heard it initially from an administrator who was explaining why Puerto Rican students were less successful in schools. The story was later repeated by: a teacher angry with the State Education Department's investigation into the schools, which she felt would put the blame for minority student failure on teachers; a teacher in an English department meeting where minority student progress was being discussed; and a school aide during a faculty room conversation in which teachers were discussing the "attitude problems" of several Puerto Rican students.

What does the story, and the context in which it was told, reveal to us? This stellar student serves, first of all, as an "ideal type": A student (as well as parents) who values education, respects teachers, and who works hard, even harder than the typical American student with far fewer obstacles to overcome. On that continuum of qualities as depicted by Seniors, he comes down solidly as the model "real American." He is linked to our national past by way of being an immigrant of the type who is said to have built our nation. What *doesn't* get said is also significant: There is never any mention of the educational, linguistic, or class background of the student. What the story affirms is that educational success, and thus success in life, can be achieved by anyone willing to work hard enough at it (and by implication most Hispanic students were not). Let us now return to the recurring themes in faculty discourse.

Theme 1: **Declining Student/Parent Responsibility.** All students were perceived as capable of performing well in school; problems educating individual children were seen not as the fault of the institution but as a result of a lack of student and parent commitment. Many teachers in informal conversations repeatedly contrasted children in general, and minority students' behaviors in particular, to those of earlier generations of schoolchildren, who were "respectful" and

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[16]Costa Ricans, approximately one fifth of the Hispanic population, were frequently contrasted favorably to Puerto Ricans prior to the public furor over Marris' comments. When the public discourse on "Hispanics" as a group emerged, talk of this dichotomy for the most part disappeared from teacher conversations. For a variety of reasons, including: their educational backgrounds and work skills; greater similarities between Costa Rican and Euro-American culture; and less "racial" differentiation from the "whites," Costa Ricans have as a group been more upwardly mobile than the Puerto Rican population taken as a whole.

[17]Further examination into the origins of the story revealed that this student was actually from Czechoslovakia. His father was a biochemist, and his mother was completing a college degree. They had lived for a short period in Canada before emigrating to Arnhem.

ostensibly worked hard in schools to get ahead. In "those days," they said, students learned respect at home, and would risk a "thrashing" if they ever dared to "backmouth" teachers. Many had anecdotes of their own run-ins with their parents as a consequence of their failure to conform to school rules. Teachers in interviews and faculty room conversations, while there were important exceptions, tended to place the blame for higher Hispanic student failure rates on the cultural "deficiencies" in the Puerto Rican community, or in the individual student's "laziness." Puerto Rican parents were routinely criticized for failing to show up at school functions such as "Open House," and for moving their children out of the district during the school year. Such actions, in teachers' views, reflected the parents' devaluation of the importance of their children's education.

Some teachers also tended to evaluate Spanish-dominant Puerto Rican students' classroom behaviors as reflecting their lack of interest in getting an education, failing to see at times when the behaviors stemmed from language or communication difficulties. ESL students interviewed, for instance, told of being reprimanded when they whispered to English-dominant friends to have them explain something the teacher had said; teachers tended to label such behaviors disruptive (which of course did at times lead to intentionally disruptive behaviors as students lost interest).

Teachers were very sensitive to charges of treating some students differently from others, and making allowances for ESL students' language problems was generally seen as more likely to harm than to help the students. An English teacher very dedicated to the well-being of her Hispanic students, for instance, expressed her surprise at the ESL teacher suggesting that she allow other students an opportunity to explain the teacher's directions in Spanish to newer Spanish-dominant students. She had never permitted such practices, as she feared that it might slow students' progress in learning English and make the students embarrassed about their "differentness[18]."

Theme 2: **Teachers as Scapegoats**. Teachers felt that they were being scapegoated for the poor performance of Hispanic students as well as for declining student test scores in general. They perceived themselves to be very dedicated to their students, and tended to feel their dedication and professionalism were being questioned when issues were raised regarding their instructional practices. For example, an attempt by the school district to better acquaint teachers with the significance of cultural and class differences between minority youth and teachers failed miserably when teachers perceived the invited speakers (who were from "Culture Link," an organization working to improve cross-cultural understanding) to be blaming teachers for minority student failure and ignoring the issue of student responsibility for academic achievement or the realities of the problems confronted by teachers on a daily basis. Some teachers angrily talked among themselves during the speakers' presentations, and several left the auditorium, disgusted, before the speakers concluded. Prior to the State Education Department spending three days investigating the schooling of minority students in Arnhem, teacher talk revolved around how they would be blamed "once again" for student failure; teachers breathed a collective sigh

[18]This teacher did implement the ESL teacher's suggestions and reported very positive responses from students.

of relief when the report failed to assign the blame to them[19].

Teachers also felt that desired changes in educational practices were frequently forced upon them without opportunities for their input. Longtime teachers could rattle off a variety of educational "whims" that had come and gone in their profesional lifetimes (e.g., mastery learning, behavioral objectives, the "Madeline Hunter" method). One teacher wondered whether "multicultural literature" was not just the most recent manifestation of the search for a magical cure for the nation's educational woes.

Theme 3: **Colorblindness.** Visions of the U.S. as a nation where groups have encountered, and continue to encounter, oppression could not be reconciled with teacher visions of the U.S. as the "land of opportunity," a notion most teachers had grown up with both at home and in their educational experiences. Teachers, as well as administrators, were uncomfortable talking about racism and discrimination. To dwell on such topics, several explained, would be to create conflicts between groups where none had previously existed. A building administrator, for instance, vehemently denied the existence of racism among some students after community leaders drew public attention to several bias-related incidents in the building. Commenting on the matter, he told a local newspaper reporter that "I don't want to label it and say an incident is anti-Polish or anti-Hispanic, they're just problems between kids.... Sure kids make slurs, but I will not accept the term racism. Once you plant the seed then you're going to have a problem" (Arnhem Record, "AHS principals's denial of racism disputed", October 11, 1991).

Observation of classes and interviews with teachers indicated a general unwillingness or uneasiness on the teachers' parts to address controversial issues such as racism in the United States, for fear that such conversations might "stir up trouble" among students if introduced into the classroom through literature or discussion of the community debate[20]. One exception was a young white male high school teacher who did encourage students to discuss controversial issues in greater depth. But an African American student in his class, though she considered him "cool" because of his willingness to talk with students about subjects such as the Rodney King verdict, angrily denounced him for his failure to "follow through" when racist talk surfaced in the classroom and the debate became heated. Rather than the teacher taking a stand against racist talk, an action that she felt would have been warranted, he had concluded the discussion by saying only that "We're all entitled to our opinions, we just have to respect others' opinions."

Similarly, teachers chose not to include some stories currently extolled by multicultural education advocates in the classroom when these stories contained obscenities, depicted disrespect for authority figures (e.g., the Church, the police), dealt with subjects deemed "too mature" for

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[19]The SED report, for the most part, put the blame on the school board and on institutional policies and practices, including an inadequate ESL/bilingual education program, tracking practices, curriculum selections, and the lack of strong school-community relations.

[20]For a detailed analysis of English teachers' responses to pressures to incorporate more multicultural literature into the classroom, see Dangerous Discourses: The Politics of Multicultural Literature in Community and Classroom (in press), by Bigler and Collins.

eighth graders, such as teenage sexual behavior, or depicted minority characters and communities routinely encountering prejudice and discrimination within the larger society. The adoption of revised literature texts designed to be more "multicultural" also did not necessarily translate into the incorporation of more multicultural literature in the classroom, as most teachers selected more familiar stories from the possible selections and omitted the "culturally different" stories.

Teachers also tended to be wary of any practices that resulted in students being separated by ethnicity or race. One middle school teacher for instance expressed her discomfort when students tended to break down into groups along ethnic lines to do classroom assignments, explaining that she didn't think it was beneficial to students as she felt it promoted separatism. Similarly, when a Latino high school student who had gathered over two hundred signatures of support proposed the establishment of a school club where Latinos could meet to discuss how to confront the problems they shared as an "oppressed people," the idea was transmogrified by the administration and board into a "multicultural" club, in which students could learn to "appreciate" the community's cultural diversity.

Discussion

Let us return for a moment to the narrative with which we began, to examine an excerpt from a Senior's "letter to the editor" that appeared in the local paper:

> My mother taught me to read and write Polish as a child at home. She sent me to a one-room schoolhouse to learn to read, write and spell English; to add, subtract and multiply so that no one would cheat me. (September 30, 1991)

Taken apart, this brief reminiscence captures much of the "story" of the Seniors. The author begins by validating his right to speak about the immigrant experience, as he is the child of immigrants. The place for native languages, he infers, is in the private domain; school, by way of contrast, is a public place and should be used only to promote the public language, English. Parents in the past, we are told, sent their children to school to learn to be good Americans, all the while knowing that it meant publicly abandoning their native tongue (and by extension, culture). The one-room schoolhouse successfully produced earlier generations of Americans, and an adequate education does not require frills. It is the job of the parents to ensure that their children get an education. People must be self-reliant and capable of protecting themselves rather than depending on others (or government) to do so. The author's reminiscence functions in a number of ways: to locate him in the public debate, to lay out his vision of what immigrants and schools should be about, and to set up a contrast to what he perceives as "Hispanic" ways of being.

Virginia Colón's narrative from her childhood years in Kansas, examined earlier, relates a painful enounter with bias, and asserts that such experiences can have devastating long-term consequences for minority youth. Her emphasis on the impact of prejudice and stereotyping, and her claims to the right to "difference," were echoed in other public appeals by minority spokespersons to change the school system. Pedro Perez, for instance, a Puerto Rican college

student who had grown up in the community, related an incident to the school board, and later the researcher, where he had been told by a teacher "to go back to where you came from," and that "you guys are all on welfare." At the time that the incident occurred, Pedro said, he had gone to the office to discuss the incident with administrators, who talked it over in private with the teacher; today, knowing what he knows now, he would not have dropped the matter at that point. The public telling of such stories functions (a) to affirm the speakers' identification (despite their individual successes) with an oppressed group in society; (b) to encourage other minority members to give voice to their own encounters with bias; and (c) to underline the imperative for the larger society to eliminate such injustices. In the telling of their stories, both Virginia Colón and Pedro Perez describe their encounters with prejudice, and how they "walked away" from incidents of bias; but they also underline their own (and by extension their group's) unwillingness to continue to accept such behaviors.

There is in the construction of these stories a dialectic between past and present operating, and these stories merit careful consideration when exploring what drives the current curriculum debates. The past of the group to which the "letter to the editor" writer belongs--the descendants of southern and eastern Europeans--is significantly different from the past experienced by African Americans, Latinos (with the partial exception of Cubans), and Native Americans. As is the present[21]. Given that one's reading of the past is shaped by present circumstances, and one's experience of the present is shaped by our knowledge of the past (Connerton, 1989), we should not be surprised to find significant differences in the narrative content of the two groups. As Benmayor et al. note (1988), stories come to "mean" diffently, both in content and function, for the two groups, given their differing structural locations in society in the present. Thus Seniors select those aspects of their past that help explain their present. If assimilation was touted as the means to success, and if they did bow to those pressures and experienced success, then their stories select from the past flow of happenings those that best "fit." Thus the past as they construct it is used to justify the present social order and their positions in it. Members of the senior citizen population can recall incidents of prejudice and discrimination, and the economic struggles that they or their parents weathered as newcomers and during the Depression years; but they also as a group experienced upward mobility and ultimately "acceptance" in the post-World War II years, when a growing economy, better-funded public services, government services such as the GI bill, and unionized jobs enhanced the likelihood of their entering the mobility queue (di Leonardo, 1992).

But in today's economy such opportunities are rarer. The nation's economic structure has been transformed, in recent decades moving away from a manufacturing-dominated economy toward a service-based economy. The decline in the manufacturing sector has meant economic and social dislocation for many Americans who, a generation ago, would have had greater opportunities to secure steady blue collar employment. The jobs that once served as stepping-stones to the middle class for second and third generation Euro-Americans are now more elusive, and the opportunities that existed for earlier generations, fewer (Weis, 1990). Simultaneously,

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[21] This is not to deny that some members of each of the groups mentioned have achieved upward mobility despite encounters with prejudice and discrimination, but rather to underline that as a whole these groups continue to score lower on conventional indices measuring quality of life and social mobility.

the federal government's commitment to a more just and equitable society has declined, and American prestige abroad has slipped, as the nation moved from its undisputed post-World War II position of leader of the West to become only one of several powerful nations on the world scene. For many Americans, the recent demographic and social changes they have witnessed in their lives have been conflated with the nation's political and economic downswing, so that blame for changes is not infrequently projected onto the increasingly visible minority communities.

And what of minorities, who continue to experience poverty and discrimination in their present lives, and for whom--as a group--the "rags to riches" stories can not possibly apply? The objective reality of hardship and discrimination generally experienced by newcomers to the United States takes on new meaning when a group as a whole has been unable to achieve the upward social mobility of earlier European groups. The stories and struggles of the past assume new importance, as they serve to connect the past to the present and to inspire struggle in the present against oppressive conditions (Benmayor et al., 1988); and reframing the past can change the ways we interpret the present. The dominant narrative for Latinos (particularly Chicanos and Puerto Ricans) and African Americans, as Bruner showed to be the case with Native Americans, has shifted since the 1960s from one of "the present as disorganization" and "the future as assimilation" to one in which "the present is viewed as a resistance movement, the past as exploitation, and the future as ethnic resurgence" (Bruner, 1986, p.139). As among other oppressed minorities, the new narrative in the process has engendered "a re-examination of the past, a rediscovery of old texts, and a recreation of the new heroes of liberation and resistance" (Bruner, 1986, p. 143), what anthropologists have come to recognize as part of the ongoing process of humans "inventing" their traditions (Handler & Linnekin, 1984). With it comes a call for educational change.

We are currently witnessing a struggle over the curricula in our public schools that is rooted in a challenge to the assumption that all ethnic groups' stories are essentially the same and which calls into question popular visions of the nation as colorblind and a land of opportunity for all that would avail themselves of such possibilities. We conclude from this ethnography that ethnicity "means" differently for struggling minority communities when compared to assimilated, relatively prosperous Euro-Americans who are now struggling to maintain their claim to being "what America is all about." Raised on an ethos of ancestral sacrifice and hard work as the essential ingredients for upward mobility, many in the Euro-American community will resist or fail to recognize the legitimacy of other perspectives or the need for changes in practices and policies that appeared to work for earlier generations. And this struggle over what "counts" as "the American experience" has important consequences to consider when urging and developing new school curricula. In Arnhem, we see that the drive to reform the school curriculum to better acknowledge and address our nation's diversity (and concomitantly, the cleavages that separate us), challenges popular assumptions and comes up against obstacles both within the schools and within local bases of power, such as school boards.

Research at the local level in the community under study indicates that the presence or absence of a diversity of voices in the libraries and classrooms of our schools *matters* for many

at-risk minority youth. The visit of the *Nuyorican*[22] author Nicholasa Mohr to the local middle school in response to public pressures for greater inclusiveness engendered considerable excitement among the Puerto Rican middle school students, and their enthusiastic responses after having read her stories of growing up Puerto Rican in New York point to their perceptiveness of the many ways in which schools render invisible the realities of their lives beyond the school doors (Rodríguez, 1989; Zanger, 1990):

> I like her stuff, 'cause she talks--you know--she just came out right straight like she didn't care. She came out right straight saying what she felt. She writes about what is going on, you know, more like about prejudice.
>
> I thought it was good. Because it was like, more like our times. Like all the other books are like real old and they taught us about like ancient history and stuff like that. This one was like you could relate to it.... Like New York City, like with all the people there like, having a hard time and stuff like that, with the money and stuff.... 'Cause you know like a lot of people are out--like these times are like that. Like they don't got a lot of money. Like in New York City. They--you could picture it in your mind.
>
> It (her book Felita [1979]) was good. 'Cause it told about prejudism and we learned a lot out of it, like not to pick on people because of their color.
>
> I think it was *so* good (Felita). She talks in Spanish and English. Like in true life.

Even more telling, one seventh grade Puerto Rican student, catching a glimpse of the researcher's book entitled Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A. (Rodríguez, 1989), expressed genuine shock that there were books about--or by--Puerto Ricans. Yet we see teachers' uneasiness with such stories, and the school board's resistance to acknowledging the need for change.

Conspicuously absent from the public voices in this debate were the perspectives of much of the population with children in the district. A small but active core of middle class Euro-American parents subsequently emerged to join forces with the Latino leadership in the next school board election, working together to elect new board members with a strong commitment to maintaining current educational programs and addressing the concerns of the Latino and African American community. The coalition, made up of parents concerned about proposed educational cutbacks and parents eager to replace board members they felt were insensitive to the needs of minority students, successfully engineered a landslide victory for their candidates. But as tensions in the community have temporarily dissipated, so has some of the incentive to implement the proposed programs intended to benefit minority students. And the continuing likelihood of escalating local school taxes, in the wake of declining federal and state aid and the loss of local industries, continues to threaten to destabilize these fragile alliances.

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[22]The term is used to refer to Puerto Ricans born and/or raised in the metropolitan New York area, and is frequently used to signal their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness from their Island-raised counterparts.

Implications for Further Research and Planning

The acknowledgment by those in power of (a) the existence and significance of racism, and (b) the need to move toward inclusion of the histories, contributions, and perspectives of minority groups, are in the eyes of minority community leaders, essential steps toward improving minority student performance. Implementing such changes in the school curriculum may help minority students to appreciate their own heritages and contributions, and to make sense of the socio-economic differences between Euro-Americans and people of color, offering an alternative vision to counter any negative evaluation emanating from the larger society. Such an awareness can also promote a sense of group identity and support, and is believed to be a means of providing *all* students with the conceptual tools to help empower them to recognize and challenge societal inequities (Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

As the component of the study focusing on teacher responses (analyzed in depth in Bigler & Collins, in press) suggests, incorporating more multicultural literature into the curriculum as a means of redressing past omissions, while a step in the direction of integrating diverse voices and perspectives into the curriculum, is inadequate in and of itself. We must simultaneously encourage educators to examine the assumptions behind their own literature choices and classroom pedagogies; to appreciate the significance of the histories and cultures of the writers in the shaping of such texts (Purves, 1991); and to take into consideration the diverse backgrounds their students bring to the text and their classrooms.

Programs that are understood as being implemented specifically for students on an "ethnic" basis, particularly in a time of eroded public support for educational funding and declining economic opportunities, run the risk of being labeled unnecessary and divisive. Telling other stories in schools, making room for competing visions of "the American experience," can not be accomplished by administrative fiat. Given the existing power structures in schools and the ethnic backgrounds of the teachers and school boards, such changes will require educational programs and practices designed to foster better communication and understanding between minority communities and educators, who must first come to understand and acknowledge the need for such changes. It will also require attention to the conditions of schooling that work against change.

Fostering better relations between the schools and minority community parents, as urged in the New York State Education Department response following their investigation of Arnhem schools, may also be useful in bringing diverse and oftentimes polarized groups in the community together. Current research suggests that the skills and resources parents have at their disposal, rather than differences in the desire to see their children succeed educationally, may explain class differences in parental involvement in their children's schooling (Lareau, 1989). When class differences are compounded by ethnic differences between home and school, the gulf between home and school may be even wider (Nieto, 1992). Finding opportunities to foster home-school connections and in the process valuing parental input and the home culture may reduce the barriers and misunderstandings between educators and minority community members and simultaneously empower parents reticent to become involved in school issues. Similarly, the school district and teachers might consider reaching out to the senior citizen component of the

community, using senior citizens as valuable educational resources and bringing seniors into the schools for activities. Greater community input and involvement hold out the promise of reducing the polarization so evident today in communities such as Arnhem.

The assumption that all ethnic stories are the same, that only the names change, has been successfully challenged by a new generation of scholars (cf. Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Rodríguez, 1989; Rosaldo, 1989), who highlight the need to consider the significance of factors including race, class, educational background, changing economic conditions, differences in the sending countries, the impact of revolutions in communication and transportation, and the reception of immigrants in the receiving country, when seeking explanations for interethnic differences in "succeeding" in the United States. But the understandings generated from their studies have yet to make their way into mainstream "folk" explanations, including as we see here, those holding local power and teachers, whose support will be essential if substantive changes are to take place.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

(0.0)	pauses or gaps in approximately tenths of seconds
(.)	micropause
CAPS	syllables or words stressed by amplitude, pitch and duration
italics	translation
::	lengthened syllables
?	indicates rising intonation contour
.	indicates falling intonation contour
(())	non-vocal action on part of crowd or speaker